

four

Quarters

published quarterly by the faculty of la salle college

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november fifteenth, 1951

vol. I, no. 1 • fifty cents

The AREA OF LITERATURE of La Salle College announces . . .

four quarters

a literary magazine published quarterly during the academic year,

- aimed at focusing the practice and appreciation of writing in the Catholic tradition . . .
- aimed more particularly at fixing a channel of expression for Faculty, Alumni, and Students of La Salle College, the Brothers of the Christian Schools, and selected outside contributors . . .

The Editors accordingly offer the pages of **FOUR QUARTERS** as a common ground for the creative, critical, or scholarly writer and the alert and reflective reader. They promise that each manuscript submitted will receive careful consideration, and, realizing that creative growth is dependent on sustained interest, they welcome the attention and comments of their subscribers.

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The Care and Prevention of Playwrights

By Walter Kerr

THOSE of us who teach playwriting sometimes wonder why one of our young student playwrights may spend three or four years with us in the universities without producing anything we can honestly consider stageworthy, and then go out into the wide, uncultivated world and within a year turn out a mature and even commercial work. We were so well equipped to help him, we had all those courses, we gave him so much of our precious personal time, and we offered him an intellectual environment in which a man should have been able to grow. The year after leaving us he spent mostly in bars and on beaches. To our chagrin, the bars and the beaches produced the work of art.

Chagrined but unbowed, we are still determined to help him, and we try to entice him back to our own, and superior, environment. Lately the universities have been offering residences to young playwrights. Come back, we say. Come out of the potholes and into the light, and let us help you write better plays. The chances are about a thousand to one, if the playwright does come back, that he will again embarrass us by producing the unproduceable. And the longer he stays, the worse he will get.

I am not suggesting that we cannot be of use to the beginning writer; we can, and we have been. But there are certain limitations to our usefulness, and I think it is wise to face them. It is also necessary to make the playwright face them, so that he does not suffer at the hands of men honestly trying to help, and so that he does not paralyze himself with misapprehensions about his trade.

The fundamental virtue of the university as an aid to playwrights is that it is a repository of historical and technical knowledge about the craft and that, as a result of years of study and synthesis, it can offer a quick resume of traditional structural principle. The neophyte had best be exposed to all this. It will save him time.

The fundamental vice of the university as a home for playwrights is that it is an essentially rational environment, devoted to logic, theory, and the study of principle. The playwright's gift, like that of other artists, is not primarily rational, but intuitive. This means, roughly, that he has an instinctive capacity for sudden and direct contact with reality—flashes of insight which are not the result of rational construction in a vacuum, but come from immediate intimacy with nature itself. What he receives are concrete images, not abstractions or equations, and universities are notorious hotbeds of abstraction and equation.

There is a certain estrangement, and perhaps even a clash, between the rational and intuitive methods of the intellect. F. S. C. Northrop

emphasizes this in *The Meeting of East and West* when he points out that the rationally arrived-at knowledge of the wave-length for blue will do nothing at all to convey to a man born blind the actual experience of blueness. Now the playwright is concerned with blueness—for him, blueness means the living reality of an action—and all the abstract equations he learns for climax, crisis, direct and indirect characterization will not convey to him or to his audience this living reality. The danger he faces in a university, where the search for equations is after all the principal business, is that he will be drawn into the fascination of the formula. He may come to believe that the equation is the living reality or a perfectly good substitute for it. Writing hard, he will produce plays as lifeless as they are mathematically irreproachable. Or, sensing his own failure, he will turn into what he is now really equipped to be—a critic.

I suppose all of this sounds a little intangible and overwrought. But those of us who teach playwriting have had it happen repeatedly to us, or to our students, in one way or another. We may have told them, perhaps in a course in drama theory or history, that tragedy is our most profound dramatic form, and that all or virtually all of our great tragedies are in verse. What we said was demonstrably true. But it did not justify the rash of verse tragedies which broke out in playwriting class some short time later. Young writers are an ambitious and elevated lot. Give them a principle about tragedy or about anything else, and they are going to attack their work as though the principle came first. The chance that any one of these plays was inspired by an immediate and tragic intuition of life is, I think, rare. And unless we really do point out that a perfectly sound critical principle is no guide whatever to the personal talent of an individual man, we may condemn that man to five or six years of laboriously perfecting a form for which he has no perceptive capacity.

Or there is my own experience of guiding a student through a series of exercises which were calculated to teach her a good deal about play structure. She seemed to learn the structure all right, but to be without any particular talent. One day when my back was turned, and my glaring formal eye not directed toward her, she forgot about the whole thing and wrote a play. It was so good I had to produce it immediately in the university theatre; it was later optioned for New York. She is still profuse about how much she learned from me, but I learned more from her. I learned that I could teach a lot of principle but that a genuine playwright is a terribly unprincipled person.

Again, a young man comes to us seeking admission, with a dozen assorted manuscripts under his arm. Here, obviously, is a very fertile fellow. At the end of a year with us, we find he has not even put pencil to paper. Is it possible that we have somehow paralyzed him? On several such occasions I have asked the student for an explanation and I have several times been answered as follows: "Oh, I couldn't possibly have wasted my time writing anything. Every lecture you gave taught me so

much that I didn't want to be making mistakes on paper that might be prevented by the very next lecture." Students have been known to go on for years this way. I thought for awhile of remodeling my classroom to include ear-plugs and a bar.

It is not just a matter of wasting time in the classroom, or even of paralyzing a given student for a few years thereafter. Carried to its full extension, the emphasis on theory and principle can destroy the output of an entire culture. Something like this happened in Renaissance Italy. Clearly, there was a fine dramatic and theatrical instinct here, bursting to be heard. It made itself heard with tremendous vitality in the *commedia dell'arte*. But the more talented and literate men who might have given Italy a literary comedy or even a tragic form were caught in the throes of classic theory. Slavishly they adhered to the rules of the academicians, and in the process went creatively sterile. Holding themselves superior to the *commedia*, with its formless and vulgar aping of the common life, they destroyed their intuitive gifts by their determined rationality.

Obviously we have got to teach what we know about theory and mathematical technique. But we have got to teach it for what it is—a kit of small tools, an assembly of shortcuts—and never pretend that it is the heart of the work. The student should know that what he is learning will serve as a sort of handy reference guide, once he has absorbed and then forgotten it. Since no intuitively perceived image will ever come with all its shoelaces perfectly tied, it is wise to know how to tie them up. But there should be no undue emphasis on the act of tying. It should be a casual habit which distracts not at all from the pursuit of the image proper. We must encourage the student to form such habits quickly and never again give them thought, so that his mind may be free to make contact with an unmanipulated reality.

The trouble with his remaining in a university after the habits have been formed is that he continues to give thought to the processes. He thinks, talks, and theorizes process far into the night. Even if he is advanced to the point of recognizing the difference between process and perception, he thinks, talks, and theorizes about that. It is a world of theory, in which one first establishes the formula and then attempts to fill it. For the artist this is putting the cart before the horse and, like all horses caught in the situation, he is brought to a standstill. The case of John Lyly is much to the point: the University Wits, of which he was one, became wits when they left the universities for the life of London. Lyly, clinging to an intellectual environment and disdaining to compete with the bear-baiting pits, chained himself to an everlasting repetition of his first intellectual conceits. Better the bars and the beaches.

Our job in the universities is to teach the traditional short-cuts and to turn them into half-forgotten habits. To make clear to the writer that they are not half so important as his own most casual glance. And to get rid of him as quickly as possible.

Rest Camp

By Claude F. Koch

REST CAMP is the winner of the first annual Catholic Press Association Short Story Award. The story, which appears for the first time in **FOUR QUARTERS**, was adjudged best by a board composed of editors of leading Catholic publications.

"SKIPPER'S going ashore in half an hour, Rubber."

Over by the rail the dumpy little figure started, turned, and split unshaven cheeks in an indecisive smile.

"That'll be great, eh, Commander, eh?" On his damp collar, cross and lieutenant's bars were dull and awry. The lieutenant commander nodded condescendingly and waved himself away, and the priest leaned his belly against the rail again, contemplating with dull-eyed fatigue the unloading operations in the Noumean dusk. His khaki clothes draped limply over the frame that awkwardly slouched, bereft of the weight that earned him his nickname—a pale, grimy, fever-ridden little man small on the transport's forward well-deck.

That earned him his nickname. The Reverend William Ball, Roman Catholic chaplain to the 501st Construction Battalion, rubbed soft, padded fingers over his cracked lips. On the wharf below, behind which glinted the dissembling sun in its setting across the red tin roofs of the palm-sheltered town, pugnacious green trucks of a Marine convoy were already loading the advance party of the Sea Bee Battalion—his battalion, his disdainful flock. . . . And later, the drinkin' padre, old Rubber Ball himself, hail fellow, the good guy among his peers would step down to the commander's jeep

and another round of drinks at this damn rest camp wherever-it-was *Saint Louis*.

But the Solomon Islands were behind. Father Ball looked down at his slight fingers clutching white the ship's rail and expelled his breath with a grating sigh. The quonset hut was behind, the screened mess ("officers only"), the beer (out beyond the screening in the Tulagi twilight bent and dejected figures of elderly men clanked messgear in the long lines—some looked in and saw him, and saw the skipper, and the tables, and the icebox), and now the rest camp in this New Caledonian security. The advance party was loaded, angular figures of men joyous on the planked seats lining the sides of the six-bys—laughing, and boisterous joking. . . . Then one looked up at him and ceased his good humor, or so the priest thought.

Father Ball turned away from the rail, and padded his awkward knock-kneed waddle toward his cabin in officers' country.

It was dark as the jeep followed the main convoy through the town, but the priest in his seat behind the commander and beside his exec shivered at the piercing whiteness of headlights. Light for the first time at night for six months. Light that cut across the paving as the trucks mounted to the hills and thrust still

glowing houses into relief. They were silent as the hushed witness of conventional life took shape in the headlights, as the faint musk of lavender or stranger scents hung in the cooling air. Like the little towns in the late springs at home. Like, thought Father Ball, the road to my first curacy. The same loneliness and uncertainty and weakness that filled him then assailed him again, and he said:

"Well, Skipper, civilization at last, eh?"

"Right-o, Padre. Here's where you fill out again. They say," the Commander turned around with a grin, "they say that the god-damnedest officers' club in the Pacific is right here at the Hotel du Pacifique . . ."

"Lead me to it," the exec yipped his shrill delight.

Father Ball nodded absently.

It was a strange returning, he thought. Six months baked in green, or scraping sodden cots in total blackness: every sound familiar, weighted and understood. Now to learn to hear again the isolated, half-recalled, and fearless sounds of a community; to see after green-blindness the wealth of a spectrum—freed of the tyranny of green. Freed of all familiars, except the self, he thought. The little-fat-man-priest-in-his-spare-time, lover of Number One. An abrupt curve, arrowing the headlights out across angular naeouli trees, sliding along wire mesh fencing and plowing shadows across the tilled earth, threw him against the exec.

"Hold it, Rubber!" The priest

shrank at the nickname. He was silent.

"But are the French lasses friendly?" Ball could not see his commanding officer's teeth—but they would be unveiled fully in the dusk, caught in a moment by the clean light approaching upgrade.

"Now, here, here," he bantered, "remember your chaplain . . ." A bark of laughter, and the little priest nodded his head with a weak smile in the darkness. It was so easy.

But to begin again maybe here. Or fifteen minutes ago with the convoy and the singing men blasting through the gate of the long, deserted wharf—twisting the streets of the town fragrant with memories aching to burn away the months just past, swinging the twisted palms and the relaxed streets, and swinging the jeep like the tail of a long dog behind. To begin again with that beginning—but just to find the moment of decision, and cast away the parasite of body that when and God knows how became the host and rode the spirit out to something infinitely small and lost. Or to begin now?

"What the hell did you say, Padre?"

"I said the men sound happy . . ." Father Ball clenched his hands on his lap and closed his ears to a reply.

And all the hushed ride through the Noumean night journeyed the priest further into the past—beyond all memories of his failure as a chaplain, along the wide roads above the lights that emphasized the pall of valleys below, back to old illusions. But then they were at Camp Saint Louis, and while the Skipper tugged at a case of luke-warm beer and the

priest watched him with desire and chagrin, the Marine Captain who was Camp Commander bobbed into the tent and handed him the notice for his morning Masses at Camp Bailey.

"And where is Camp Bailey, eh?" Ball slipped the notice into his sagging khaki shirt and grabbed eagerly for the tin of beer.

"Across the way, Chaplain. And watch yourself," the Marine Officer grinned in the candlelight, "it's a Raider camp and one of the outfits is heading North soon; they need a Catholic chaplain . . ."

"Not for me; not for me," he lifted the can to his lips with a jerky movement and drank avidly, "I wouldn't go back there for the Pope himself."

II.

The bell was a pattern in his consciousness long before he awakened. Back and forth, the notes caught pure like water in a silver pool, stirring a dream with echoes of the seminary lawn created anew each morning for the cassocked boys, the ripples widening to drag within the dream the room where once he, a little boy, still sleeps and late for Mass. . . . But he awakened to the instant morning: outside the tent the paper-peeling bark of a naeouli, and the bellling across the startled valley. The priest hunched to his feet, clattering a beer can across the tent flooring. No movement in the two remaining bunks. The first night's party had done its work. His wristwatch blurred to the hour, and he remembered his Mass at the Raider camp.

But when he had dressed and trimmed his beard, and—clearing the still sleeping camp—returned the disinterested greeting of a sentry, the bell distracting from some memory down the valley drew him, shuffling and vulnerable, down a trail between kauri.

There was a moment of hesitation at a wide dirt road, untravelled in the early morning; if there were signs, he did not see them—the bells clipped echoes from hills he could not see beyond the thickened growths of palm and kauri and wry naeouli; and so he took the wrong trail, continuing on the road deeper into the trees down the valley.

Then they ceased their calling and he paused, suddenly breathless. Up and down the trail was the silent morning, and the light held in the moisture of fronds. When he moved again, bewildered, he heard his footsteps and was uneasy. Lifting his feet carefully, he tugged at the cross on his collar and searched through the texture of fronds settled overhead for the sky—seeking movement of clouds, of birds.

And when the bells pealed forth again—jarring, it seemed, from the trees into which he had been staring, he bit his lip and quickened his steps.

The mission was there suddenly, unexpectedly at the turn of the trail: a whitewashed mass on a rise, its spire directing his eyes to the lavender and green mountains against which it ordered its whiteness. Then he knew he had been climbing, for, looking off to his left, along the fringe of woodland stretched out-

buildings latticed like cloisters and irregular patches of farmland sloping to a blue marsh.

III.

The two nuns were so still he had not noticed them. They were up to his right, by a tumbling stone wall below the church level, their habits the dusty grey of stone. They stood in repose, facing him.

He raised his hand and smiled, and one nodded her head so slightly he hesitated to advance. The stones, tumbled to their feet, deepened their silence to the silence of statues in the grottoes of the seminary where the bells tolled. Here now, the bells were silent, he realized. The sky a settled blue that backed the spire; the spire and the mission church arching beyond the stone wall; the grey wall that backed the grey nuns—and only he stood alone and out of it.

"Sister," he hesitated again—addressing the nun who had nodded to him, "Sister, I'm a Catholic priest, and I'm afraid I'm lost . . ."

He watched the nun incline toward her companion, whisper, and then move with robes dissolving into morning toward him down the grade. Her companion remained still, hands folded before her in her long grey sleeves.

The nun confronting him, her eyes fixed with respect on the ground at his feet—he saw the bone structure sharpened beneath the yellow skin and thought of the decaying year and a fragile leaf come to rest.

"I speak English, Father," she said—and in her voice he heard the disturbing calm of the bells, "this

is the mission of Saint Louis."

"Then I have taken the wrong road. The Marine camp—the raider camp—Bailey—where is it, Sister?"

Behind her the other nun took a faltering step forward.

"I am sorry, I do not know, Father. I have just arrived myself." The grey robe fell back from her arm, and Father Ball looked quickly away from the limb, severed at the wrist. "The Curé up there, he will tell you . . ."

The church again on the rise. He hesitated; to step beyond her was to enter the intolerable regularity of the circle of sky, mountain, church, and wall.

"Father," her voice was timid. "You have just come back?"

"Yes."

"The Solomon Islands? It was most difficult there, was it not?"

But to stay was to be involved in *this*. Down the fragile and delicately ordered fields, tilled in grey-green shimmering levels to the marsh, he saw himself walking, in his mind's eye, with honor. The degrading personal recollections of the islands were as unreal as the islands themselves, here where the nun's calm voice was thunder stirring memories.

"Yes, Sister," who in this timeless place could contradict? "at times, it was very difficult." (Out in the Tulagi twilight, again and again the men averted their eyes from the priest in the screened enclosure—yes, difficult.)

With a quick, shy glance at her face in its wasted repose, he gestured farewell and entered the citadel of wall and church and hill. She moved soundlessly aside and stepped

to the wall, extending the ruined arm to her companion.

The church smelled of springs of damp, and termites had eaten at carved statues in the indefinite shadow. Father Ball genuflected toward the vague repository, and withdrew. The nuns no longer stood by the stone wall, the valley and the marsh drew him, and as he followed the stone wall downward he felt relief from that disturbing solitude.

If, he said, I say my Mass this morning, and resolve—because I've done no wrong: loneliness is not a sin, and if I was occasionally comfortable, I needed it more than most men, who . . . His voice fell suddenly upon his own ears, and he halted and looked around at the fields where nobody moved. He was at the marsh, and as he searched upwards again at the white spire, he saw the grey nuns, immobile, watching him.

"Anyhow," he spoke softly across the mile of intervening hill to them, "with God's help I will not go back there, I'm lost if I go back there, and here I start again . . ."

As though they heard him, the grey forms pirouetted silently and drifted in their smallness toward the chapel, entered, and yielded deeper silence to him.

IV.

"Y'know, Skipper," he told the commanding officer that evening as they drove toward the Hotel du Pacifique, "I never did find the Raider camp—wandered around for three hours on the edge of that marsh, finally got a hop back to camp—and then, eh, discovered that Camp

Bailey was right across the road from us."

"Padre, Padre—you just didn't want to go to the trouble of saying that Mass."

Lanterns bobbed in the slight breeze sweeping in across Ile Nou and the harbour swaying its lighted shipping in the evening tide. Lanterns in the iron-railed enclosure of the officers' club from which female voices cut across the heavy chatter and the roll of the slot machines . . . and female voices seized the senses beyond the odor of stale beer . . . and the SP's on patrol beside the gate and the morose enlisted drivers in the jeeps were unnoticed in the female voices that usurped the night beneath the lanterns . . .

"God, women!" said the exec, and Father Ball trailed them into the portico beneath the lanterns.

"And female voices," the skipper was saying, "are enough to make you forget your sacred office, Padre." At which Father Ball smiled mechanically and wedged his way to the bar.

"Well, here we start *all o-ver a-gain*, hey?" And the exec's sing-song and loud releasing laughter rang to the exclusion of all else in the little priest's mind. His hand over the damp bar halted halfway to a glass and closed in an ineffectual fist. He bowed his head . . . and the grey forms pirouetted silently and drifted in their smallness toward . . .

"Yo, Padre!"

The lights burst in the shattering noise and the Skipper's teeth were white in the grin that promised acceptance and enervated dissent.

"Are you just back from the islands, Chaplain?"

The shot was comfortably down, and he was warm and secure before he turned to reply. This was a type he had seen on the posters in Chaplain's School—a pursed sensitive mouth, and a thin face poised with considerate expectation. A lone silver bar was very straight, impeccably balancing the cross.

"Yes, Chaplain," he said. "I'm Father Ball, with the 501st Sea Bees."

"You came in yesterday then. I'm Slade. Presbyterian chaplain at the Raider camp across from Saint Louis . . ."

"I got lost hunting your camp yesterday." Ball waved two whiskey-strights from the corporal behind the bar.

"I know," Slade laughed deferentially. "Say, let's sit down and talk a while. I haven't been up yet, you know, and I'd like to hear . . ."

The priest balanced his drink and led his youthful confrere through the thick smoke and the boisterous crowd, out past the slot machines to the lanterned patio and an empty table under the palms.

"How did you know?"

"What? Oh, that you were lost? I came over after you—I'm the only chaplain now at Bailey—and I wanted to be sure you got there for the Catholic men. I figured you took the wrong turning—to the Mission, and the sisters put me straight."

"The sisters?"

"Yes, I must have come up just behind you. One is blind, you know—but the other said you had wandered down to the marsh, and that

you were quiet and seemed ill. She was quite concerned."

"That was good of her, eh? But why should she think I was ill?"

The young man shrugged in his narrow shoulders, and tilted his head sympathetically: "But you do look all in, you know. It must have been pretty tough up there . . ."

Ball blinked at him and dropped his eyes quickly to his drink. The lanterns danced their wan light across his soft fingers cupping the glass; he moved his chunky arm into that more certain light.

"They're wonderful, those nuns." Slade's voice rose enthusiastically. "They were prisoners of the Japs on Bougainville, you know—evacuated by an American sub just a few weeks ago—and they want desperately to go back, even the blind one . . ."

The priest shrank within himself and was silent.

"The one lost her arm up there—she spoke great admiration for you—you must have suffered, she said." Slade reached over and touched Ball's arm, "So I invited them over to your Masses—every morning. To hear you preach on Sunday . . ."

"Every day! But they can't do that!"

"Ah, but they can, Father. You see, they're just back here to rest too, and they have quite a lot of freedom—like yourself."

"But you say they want to go back," Father Ball ran his hand nervously through his hair. "It'll be worse—much worse for everyone, the second time. It is bad enough the first . . . A man—anyone—goes to pieces. Why, you can lose your soul . . ."

Slade patted his hand again, "I know, I know, Father. The nun said it must have been terrible for you . . ."

"No, no—I don't mean . . . Oh but you don't understand . . ."

Over the clipped sound of glasses there was a scuffling at the gate, and when Ball turned back to Slade the man's eyes, soft and thoughtful, were fixed on him.

"Why didn't you come with us, Father? You're right, I don't understand—but you, with your experience—and we need a senior chaplain, and a Catholic . . ."

Ball struggled to his feet. "Not for the Pope himself," he said. "I need a drink."

And before the shocked eyes of the younger man, he pushed his chair clumsily aside and waddled toward the bar.

V.

Though the bells were a discordant clang splitting with a knife of ice a vast pocket of pain, he did not waken. The dream recurred endlessly, and he watched himself groping and hopeless to pull his figure away from before the blurred grey daubs behind which the fire flared. Separated from them by the Host quivering in his hand he saw their broken faces bow away in a blur, while mumbled to a trapped conclusion in their humility his Mass disintegrated to a bitter taste of the night in his mouth.

See, Father, we come every day, at the chapel door that shifted and dissolved the nuns' faces had a terrible brightness of what lost innocence? Chaplain Slade is sending

the jeep . . .

The habit fell from her arm across the eyes of the falling face.

The bells silenced. He awakened. At first he could see nothing.

Grotesque through the opened tent flap the waiting trees were still. A guide line flapped emptily its inverted question, noose-like across the slit entrance. At the foot of his cot the bulk of his holster suggested certainty.

The bells dissected his thought. He sank back, horrified.

VI.

On the third day, when the profanely startled exec jerked aside the tent flap with Ball's change-of-station orders in his hand, he found the priest on his knees beside his footlocker, carefully stowing tins of beer on the tray.

Under his bunk, T-shirts, dungarees, and shorts lay discarded.

"By God, Rubber," he shook the papers at Ball. "These are to the Raider Regiment! Did you ask for this?"

The chaplain nodded, and avoided his eyes.

"Well, I'll be damned . . ."

"No," Father Ball said, "no, you won't. But I will."

Hidden, down the valley the bells chimed *Angelus*, and a beer can clattered from the priest's fumbling hand.

He stood with difficulty, and padded to the entrance to the tent, the indecisive mouth trembling, the little hands groping toward the dull canvas that stretched without ambiguity in the sun.

The Two Faces of Fiction

By John F. McGlynn

IN its gradual emergence as a finished literary type the novel has been chiefly nourished by two tendencies which, when fused together, have produced some of the finest works of the imagination, but which, when opposed or in separate dominion, have spawned at best the ephemeral best-seller or the sterile, studied, pampered desideratum of this or that cult of the *avant garde*. I am speaking of the tendencies towards naturalism and towards "romance," using the latter term in the sense that Hawthorne applies it to his own brand of fiction, with more "latitude both as to . . . fashion and . . . material" than the realistic novel would allow. The strange truth is that both tendencies apparently spring from the same desire, which is at once touchstone and method of the art of fiction. Henry James hit at the heart of the thing when he remarked:

. . . the air of reality (solidity of specification) seems to me to be the supreme virtue of a novel—the merit on which all its other merits . . . helplessly and submissively depend. If it be not there, they are all as nothing, and if these be there, they owe their effect to the success with which the author has produced the illusion of life.

And further in the same essay:

Catching the very note and trick, the strange irregular rhythm of life, that is the attempt whose strenuous force keeps Fiction upon her feet.

To catch the strange irregular rhythm of life: how our naturalist, reading that, fastens on the word *irregular*! and how our romancer is impelled by the word *strange*! The naturalist will often aim at presenting a broad, sprawling, people-studded panorama in which the real protagonist is environment, in which the characters only *respond*, seldom questioning, and never opposing with any very positive strength. Steinbeck has one of his characters in *The Grapes of Wrath* say: "The hell with it! There ain't no sin and there ain't no virtue. There's just stuff people do. It's all part of the same thing. And some of the things folks do is nice, and some ain't so nice, but that's as far as any man got a right to say." This philosophy of determinism seems to be fundamental in such disparate works as Nelson Algren's *The Man With the Golden Arm* and James Jones' *From Here to Eternity*.

It does not require a very sharp eye to locate in the background of Algren's book the awkward shadow of Studs Lonigan, though Algren surely gains something over Farrell in his more elegiac mood. Still, it is the color and clamor and *impersonal* appetite of the Chicago slum setting of the novel, rather than the conflict of will and *personal* appetite of any of its inhabitants, that determines the action. The lives and dreams of Frankie Machine and Zosh and Sparrow and Captain Bednar impinge one on the other with the violent but meaningless importunity of billiard balls. They are all in effect derelicts, and, while the writer compels from

us a fine sympathy, he never makes their plight tragic, only pathetic. More objectively deterministic is *From Here to Eternity*, with its evocation of the pattern of military life, its basic contrast of enlisted men and officers. Like Algren's novel, but to a greater extent, it relies on the raw power of shock treatment and I suppose no valuable criticism of it will come until the shock wears off.

The romancer differs from the naturalist in that he tries to capture the overtones of life. His field of operations is often small, but he probes more deeply, trying to communicate life's rhythm in the subtle interplay of man's inner life and external environment. Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* is this kind of novel, its action always radiating out from, always returning to, Scobie's conflict. It is a tragic action in that, invested with a kind of cosmic pity and ignorance of the final saving grace of Grace itself, Scobie must will self-destruction. He is too strong to be pathetic, as Frankie Machine is pathetic, trapped in circumstance.

Naturalism has been the dominant tendency in the fiction of the present century, even up to the moment, as the *reclamé* attendant on *From Here to Eternity* makes evident. Certainly among the causes of this dominance is the impregnation in all sectors of experience of the method and implications of scientific psychology. The Freudian's attack on the inviolability of personality is reflected in the novelist's distrust of human dignity and his reluctance to motivate behaviour in any but the most elementary way. Furthermore, the naturalistic writer tends to repeat the therapeutic technique of the psychiatrist, wherein the patient is encouraged to bring willy-nilly to the surface of his mind any and all ideas as they appear. Still further, the naturalistic novelist echoes the Freudian accent on sex as the final, infallible skeleton key to behaviour. Granted, sexual promiscuity is a sign of vitality and hence a means of limning character outline; but it is a sign of undirected or uncontrolled vitality, and possibly vitiates more than it reinforces.

And yet, despite the success of Jones and Algren and John Hersey (of *The Wall*, not *Hiroshima*) and Norman Mailer, there seems to be a powerful movement today away from naturalism, away from the determinism of morality and personality in which it is grounded. Philip Rahv, in a remarkably lucid and persuasive essay, characterizes the present debility of naturalism:

What was once a means of treating material truthfully has been turned, through a long process of depreciation, into a mere convention of truthfulness, devoid of any significant or even clearly definable literary purpose or design. The spirit of discovery has withdrawn from naturalism; it has now become the common denominator of realism, available in like measure to the producers of literature and to the producers of *kitsch*.

In a somewhat different spirit, Miss Caroline Gordon finds Hemingway's compass restricted to "a narrow range of experience" which "in our crisis-ridden world is inadequate. We can hardly believe any longer in the

Divinity of Man. We are more concerned today with man's relation to God."

To look into Hemingway's latest novel, *Across the River and into the Trees* is to look at the empty husk of a once fine, vigorous talent. The disillusionment and toughness are here completely synthetic. Reality has given way to stereotype. People respond to stimuli—and almost exclusively conversational stimuli at that—in a way out of all proportion to the causes. The colonel swings from gentleness to harshness with the fluidity and lack of resistance of a stream curving past rocks. The author's purpose is presumably to communicate purposelessness, to voice the utter meaninglessness of human values in our society; the effect is only to divert the characters themselves into meaninglessness. This is *kitsch*, if that word puzzled you—*kitsch*, naked and, alas, unashamed.

Perhaps the most singular evidence of the swing away from naturalism in our fiction is the wealth of symbolism in many contemporary novels. In one sense naturalism may be defined by its desire to make language one-dimensional. It proceeds on the basis that the rhythm of life is best recaptured by an attention not to symbols, but to details. Its sacred trinity of procedure goes this way: a) specificity of detail; b) concentration of detail; c) density of detail. Its practitioner uses symbols as much as possible only as the scientist uses them, as static controls for his ideas. They are nothing more than the most available means of referring to something else and are thus distinguished from the romancer's use of them as the very quickening impulse of his art, wherein they take on what one critic calls "a constantly expanding and reverberating meaning."

The hero of *From Here to Eternity* happens to be a supreme bugler. However, his mastery of this instrument seems to have in the story only the function of accentuating the central irony, the wasteful, unnecessary death of the good soldier, sacrificed to the injustice of the army caste system. One can, of course, impose other meanings; for example, the contrast of Prewitt's skill with the bugle and with his fists can be made to symbolize the contrast of beauty and brutality in the world, with the latter ironically most in demand. But such interpretations seem to be accidents of form and not basic to the writer's intention. Frankie Machine of Algren's prize-winning novel is, like Prewitt, a virtuoso. He is a dealer in a gambling house, a man with a golden arm, and his skill has in general the same relationship to the narrative pattern as Prewitt's. It is true he is a more rootless character than Prewitt, so that his end, a miserably bungled suicide, has more pity than irony attached to it. Not with a bang does he go out but with "one brief strangled whimpering."

However, to turn to a novel written in the other tradition is sometimes to enter a whole world of complicated, interworking symbols. A singular case in point is James Agee's *The Morning Watch*, a very brief novel published early in 1951. The story concerns the efforts of a boy of twelve to participate in the spirit of Good Friday. Fundamentally it

is a story of the distractions which beset him, culminating in his sneaking off with several companions to a swimming hole in the woods nearby. Symbolically, I found it a story contrasting the emotional effects of a sterile, dead dramatic show, Christ's Passion and Crucifixion and Resurrection—with its abstract and undefined cruelties and mysteries, and the effects of Nature's immediate drama of life and death—with its cruelties and mysteries intensely physical, intensely alive, intensely personal to the boy. The symbols are unavoidable and stark. Thus, in his walk through the woods Richard encounters the intact shell of a locust. The boy is much more rapt here than earlier, praying in the chapel towards "a dry chalice, an empty grail."

That whole split back. Bet it doesn't hurt any worse than that to be crucified.

He crossed himself.

He sure did hold on hard.

He tried to imagine gripping hard enough that he broke his back wide open and pulled himself out of each leg and arm and finger and toe so cleanly and completely that the exact shape would be left intact.

Later, after his stolen plunge in the forest pool—which itself is part of the complicated symbolism—he and his companions come across a snake which has just emerged from its last year's skin.

In every wheaten scale and in all his barbaric patterning he was new and clear as gems, so gallant and sporting against the dun, he dazzled, and seeing him, Richard was acutely aware how sensitive, proud and tired he must be in his whole body, for it was clear that he had just struggled out of his old skin and was with his first return of strength, venturing his new one.

The association that this image has with the events commemorated and renewed on this spiritual day of days is expanded by all that follows: by the pride that drives Richard to smash in the snake's head despite his adoration and fascination and fear of it, by his realization that the snake will die slowly, will linger in fact till sunset, by Hobe's tossing the serpent among the hogs which "with snarling squeals, scuffled over the snake, tore it apart at its middle wound and, while the two portions tingled in the muck, gobbled them down."

Unmistakable in this novel, and, indeed, in a whole sector of contemporary fiction (look to novels like Frederick Buechner's *A Long Day's Dying* and Alfred Hayes' *The Girl on the Via Flaminia*), is a lyricism which, it appears to me, is more proper to poetry than to fiction. These writers attempt to extend unduly the modern fictional devices of the interior monologue, the flashback, etc. Such devices, handled with care, serve wonderfully to concentrate the action of the story, but if they do not concentrate it in the characters and in such a way that the characters move more substantially in their own material, time-locked, space-locked background, then the demands of some other art than fiction are being served. Sometimes in Agee's story there is the effect that the boy loses his separate identity, which gives weight to the objection of some critics that these are

not the sensibilities of a boy of twelve—an objection which on the surface might appear to be mere carping.

The poet at the level of apprehension is not much concerned with “the rhythm of life”; his concern is his intuitions about life. He imposes his own rhythm, a formular one, the rhythm of his medium, poetry. His is even a suspensive art to the degree that he progresses by splitting apart the emotion from the experience in which it is contained. He tends to abstract where the novelist tends to only sympathize. The novelist can ill afford poetic abstraction and still preserve that correspondence between his creation and the pattern of life as we know it, that “solidity of specification” which Henry James called the inspiration, despair, reward, torment, and delight of the novelist. He can ill afford to let symbols become their own excuse for being in his composition. This would be extreme romancing, as destructive in its way as the extremes of naturalism in theirs.

The conclusion appears to me unavoidable that the writer who carries his symbolism too far creates at most lifeless parable; equally unavoidable, that the writer who concerns himself solely with swaths of fact creates only case histories. There is a middle channel down which the finest novels sail: such recent works as *The Gallery*, 1984, *The Heart of the Matter*, *The Track of the Cat*, and *The Brave Bulls*. To appreciate them is to appreciate a truth on which they depend, that the romancer, if his work would have richness, must focus his vision in a clear-eyed perception of the solid specifications of reality, that the naturalist, to be likewise successful, must grant his land-locked gaze the mariner’s freedom, who steers by both reef and star.

Brief Candle

By Claude F. Koch

The children dance from school; behold, their sun
Has crossed its nadir and their clock is stopped
At joy. Their spring unwinds its hours,
But no time from out each gay face lours.
Their year is always noon, and no alarm
Dropped from all the calculating world’s bell towers
Dare second harm upon these sons of ours;
No tick shall irritate the minute heart,
And daylight saving is the standard watch
Apart from us they keep. Oh, we make much
Of sun and time, behold these sons eclipsing everyone
In brightness like the sun,
And, unlike time, in fun.

Two Poems

Like Olive Plants

Like olive plants, the Psalmist says my children are:
Banked round about the table in a ring.
And I in whose untropical asphalt no such green things grow
Am puzzled. I think of them as roaring lions seeking to devour.
They share, I guess, some qualities with trees: they're strong,
They willow with the wind, they sob in spring—
Perhaps for different reasons—
(I have never had a tree come running to me desolate),
They're thick of skin, impervious to rain,
They sink their feet delightfully in mud and seem to thrive
And only God can know how far their subtle roots stretch underground.
But I cannot see in them the comeliness of trees:
The sweet leanover, leaf-dripping loveliness, the sanguine shade;
I see the stalk only, bitter with growth,
And am harassed by husbandry.

The Psalmist has, however, bigger eyes
And visions harvest and transfiguration:
Blossom and flower and fruit—
Fruit of the womb bearing fruit of its own in time
And going gathered and resplendent to the market.

By Leo Brady

Donne's Distraction Is Not Mine

John Donne complained a fly glanced through his prayers
Diverting him from God. I envy Donne.
Donne the divine upon his wooden knees
Beside the altar on an inert summer day
Tracing the burr and drone a fly makes
Like a feather in the ear, while huger hosts
With wings wait in the dome for messages
And tap, perhaps, angelic feet.

For Donne, at least,
There was a spell that could be broken:
Impertinent and agile fly could interrupt
Some supplication, never mind how tenuous.
God was served among the interstices
Of the web of flight this buzzer drew
So noisily on sanctuary air. My plight is poorer.
The contemplation of a fly is nearer than I get
To a consideration of the heavenly design.

Include me in your orbit, fly predestinate,
That I may watch God's will unfold
In your minute transparent wings, and see
You grease your fragile body nervously
Exactly in accordance with His plan.
Groan in the capacious vaults of my pretense
One small thin sound as here upon my knees
I contemplate distraction emptily.

The Sign

By Edward Garry

ROCKBOUND and cold, its great length commanding the smooth, traveled terrain up and down and crosswise for many yards, the iron cyclops stretched in the cheerful light and welcomed warmth of the middle time. When the giant creature winked its emerald eye, as it did at minute intervals, the impatient throng of smaller creatures surged ahead and over, showing no fear despite the nearness of numerous crouching, wide-faced monsters eagerly threatening their safety. For the stern cyclops also controlled the dash and drag of the monstrous things and encouraged the smaller beings to pooh-pooh and scorn their menacing speed and power.

Out of the motley reaching the other side, one individual in black garments separated himself from his fellows and preferred to linger on the brink, a yard above and away from the dark, wide speedbed. He stood watching something, another individual like himself, a man also costumed in black clothes topped by an endless white band around his neck, a taller and heavier and stranger man. The clothes of the smaller man were not unlike those of his tall counterpart, except for the collar, which in his case was a band of white like the usual neckpiece and not turned around, and his cravat was a flat piece of black silk that covered the total front of his shirt.

At a short remove from the side

of the brink, the taller of the two men stood in a small indentation away from the swirling mass of busy bodies and the smell and touch of the monsters. In this shelter he leaned easily against an upright post, his head inclined, looking like a philosopher musing on life and its affairs, or a serious student reflecting on his own problems, unaware that the smaller man watched him.

The smaller man kept watching the tall man, his face intent, the corners of his mouth twitching, his right hand going up occasionally to the back of his head and neck, wondering and amazed at what he saw.

From the topmost button of his form-fitting double-breasted overcoat, a garment of extraordinary length having a black velvet collar and a triangle of white linen barely visible above the top pocket, the tall man let hang an arresting placard three feet square. The sign carried on its surface a series of incredible markings evidently made by a stout brush that had been dipped in scarlet red and coal black paints. The man's left hand held the edge of the singular sign, making sure it wouldn't turn over when sudden gusts of wind now and then blew along the man-made canyon. The smaller man let the words on the sign fall sharply and deliberately upon his mental stencil. The sign read:

Read Your Bible!
 Hear Me
 Bertie Bible
 Richard Waller
 Sunday 11 P.M.
 Station WABS
Read Your Bible!

Vibrating like an alerted anchored organism, the smaller man reached into the side of his black burberry and took out a small book, into which he made scratches with a thin instrument held in his fist. He caused the metal thing to glide rapidly over the surface of the paper getting down the wording of the fascinating sign, as though he was obliged to copy every word in a very short time. Periodically he would hesitate before making a new mark, as though he were debating with himself on some crucial detail, and then write more furiously than before. During the entire time of writing, he managed a grin on his face.

Before the smaller man had completed his writing, he saw with some alarm that the tall man was coming towards him, hurrying as though impelled by an invisible force. It was too late for the small man to turn and go, for the tall man had the jump on him. So he stood where he was and waited, hoping that their meeting would be brief, and that having said something, the tall man would pass on.

The carefree day was too lazy with spring for anyone to enter into controversy. The fresh, heavy fragrance of hyacinths and carnations and roses and jonquils hung in the

air from the open-door florist shop, and the seductive odor could disarm the most redoubtable Spartan warrior. So the smaller man waited, wondering, hoping for no conflict, his head bent and hand still, his body shaky.

He was conscious of the large shoes before he saw the face of the tall man in the long overcoat, and they came up to him as black, shapeless congress gaiters, with knobs in the leather that indicated bunions and crooked toes. The feet were those of an old man or one who had walked thousands of miles. But the small man had no time to reflect upon what the shapeless shoes might mean, because a ministerial, disturbing voice stabbed his ear.

"Friend," the voice said in exaggerated tones, "did you read your Bible this morning?"

The small man froze; he couldn't speak; he couldn't move a finger. He could only look at the derby and its jaunty angle, and at the swarthy skin of the lugubrious face, and at the two cold, distant pools of darkness set high in the long swarthy expanse. He could discern very clearly the magnified bristles that shot out from the man's jowls and chin and upper lip, as though he were viewing the saturnine face through the grotesquerie of a magnifying glass. But the distorted face turned from him and the voice came forth again from some place in the man's interior, a stronger sounding-board now, more evangelical, more sepulchral in tone, and as he spoke he held onto his sign so that all who approached might read and all who had ears might hear.

"Folks, did you read your Bible this morning? Everyone, even ministers of the Gospel, must read their Bible every day; it's the only way to worship God."

The small man came out of his seizure and turned to hurry away. He had witnessed sufficient strangeness for one day, even a spring day in the greatest city in the world, and he had enough to think about for his next story. His thoughts therefore told him to flee, to run before the torrent, the flood, the inscrutable powerful thing that weakened his insides and sent a metallic taste high up to his mouth. In the region behind his navel a noisy contraction had his entrails, and the bones in his legs momentarily turned to chalk. But before he could take his second step, his stride was matched by the step of the tall man, who kept shouldering him and throwing his weight and crowding him as they both stepped along the fancy avenue, moving southward towards the great white library that has the two well-known stone lions.

The small man kept his look fixed straight ahead, not looking fully right or left, ignoring his partner-in-stride, hoping to elude him and fearful that he would never succeed. To forget the demon tearing at his vitals, he focused his attention on the passersby. He forced his face to take on a steady wisp of a smile and made his mind hook onto the faces as they came towards him. But his hook slid off the smooth faces, never able to hold onto any crevice of recognition. The well-fed faces of men in business grays and blues and tans were not for his memory's

touch; the easy, gentle, slightly vanished magnets with the bright veily bonnets registered nothing but aloofness. Cool and distant and beautiful they were, like the gem in the Ethiop's ear. But not for him.

He was alone, a solitary traveler on much traversed land, with an enigma nudging him whose absurd sign advertised the carrier's audacity and the small man's unease.

"Are you game?"

That voice again! The disturbance went into his head and shot down into his lower region, and for a moment he double-stepped and lost his stride.

"Will you listen to me on Sunday night?"

Now the bass tones jabbed his brains, turning them over, although he managed to regain his stride. His brains said that there'd never be another Sunday night. From Friday to Sunday is an age, a light-year.

"Are you game? I said."

The strident tones were jarring around in his stabbed head, his punctured interior, his echoing soul. They were making game of him. He thought he might be saying the crazy words himself.

"Will you listen?"

He must take hold of this madness and form words that will make sense and bring him peace. He would put those strong words in line, marshaling them one after the other and make them fight his battle. But his mouth refused to open, his sound box was paralyzed, he did not speak. He could blame it on the small particle of gum between his front teeth, that small thing acting like cement, keeping his teeth together. Words

now would startle himself.

If he could just blurt out anything. A "Shut up!" A wild "Go to hell!" Anything would free him from the sign, the interior sign and the exterior sign. But no ejaculation came out. No sound came forth.

It might be just as well, for the sign would stop and the voice would sound, and the enigma would exploit the hesitation on his part. He didn't want to hear that voice again, that disturbing sound and the rhetorical question. He didn't want to see that sign flaunted again, that obscene display, that pitchman and barker technique.

In his mind's eye he could see the boisterous thing. Paint from it blinded him, the red stung his interior eyeballs, the black muddled his thinking. He moved his eyes to the right without moving his head and placed his thoughts on the fragile softnesses in the window, the delicate pinks and mauves and orchids and salmons, making his mind jump the occasional blacks. The sheer, diaphanous things with the fine workmanship at the heels, the netting for loveliness and mystery, the things that give unforgettable form and shape, the beige and tan and flesh.

These were harbingers of a real world that made sense and could be understood, a world that might help a solitary forget his flight from a mad pursuer. There could be peace and serenity and ease and no fear in such a world. It was a world of consolation and music and softness and shy voices.

And in the other windows his turned eyes could see the comple-

ment to that in the other windows, these brighter, dazzling, stronger windows, where gems and circles and bands and strings and v-shaped lines gave back in a thousand different, despairing ways the gold and white and blue of the sky and sun. This world also could make sense, and those who frequented it; and he met in his mind furtive inhabitants dwelling in the small segment he had known.

Only strangers faced him, distant faces passed him by as though he did not exist, complacent faces looked through him and he never felt so desperate. He had a hundred acquaintances in this Bagdad, this city of homes on cliffs, but the dwellers were oblivious of him.

He thought he was free of his stalker.

"What are you?"

That voice hit against his head. That piercing blow again.

"Jesus?"

He knew he had to escape this darkling occult thing, even if the ground beneath his feet were to open. He had to flee. His liaison with a barker, a mountebank, a fly-by-night revolted him. He was in cahoots with fraud and the banal. He was a confederate to a pitchman. It must not be.

The big blueness struck his eye and cleared his head. He couldn't have wished for a better beachhead to get out of his sea of unease, this sea with its treacherous quicksands and whirlpools. The brightness of the shield and the buttons and the face. The blue of the eyes.

"I wonder if you could help me, officer?" Hold it there, the voice

for the first time, hold it even and steady and low and cool, now that you're out of the waves. Ignore the off-center, off-sound cadences. At ease, you're on the beach.

"Sure, Father, what is it?"

Cool again now, light now again, anything now, anything at all, it doesn't have to be real, to make sense, to be exact, to be your need, as long as you're cool.

"Where can I get a train for Brooklyn?" That's it, now.

"Why, anywhere along here." The blue sheen of the arm went up and to its right and came around and back and rested at the side.

As if you didn't know that, as if you were a real stranger, as though you were from the hinterlands; and the taller man sees and hears and stands and holds his tongue and his sign and you know he's making that bold front to impress, to keep you under his eye. You must get him now. To speak then, lightly too, with dignity. It's no time to lose.

Look at the blueness. "Can you step in here a minute?"

"Sure, Father."

A step, and his step.

"Is he annoying you?"

A nod of the head. The first flush of retaliation followed by a surge demanding vindication, the passionate exhaust, and the return of strength. No. Stifle the low thing!

"He's a jerk. I'll fix him."

Steady now in leaving, no running, throw off the shackles and take a step and you'll be in a world you understand. To the right then. A glancing blow from a fusillade of words, a staggering, a stop. The stridency again.

"Folks, did you read your Bible this morning? Everyone, even policemen, must read their Bible every day."

A flash of blueness to the left. A sound as decisive as a gunshot.

"Hey, you!"

The sign and the blackness and the derby and the swarthinness came round. Another conflict. Small blueness against tall blackness. Better than small blackness against tall blackness. Much better.

He was free to move leisurely away, free to ease up, free to look from left to right. He could move across the narrow numbered street and then turn to watch. His insides taut still, and the taste not yet lifted from his teeth. The moisture on his broad forehead and upper lip and below the armpits cooling now under the aegis of the breeze along the avenue. The soft faces and their red and blue and dark halos. On some the varnish had cracked and the teeth show, regular, white, strong. The sheen from long hair to shoulders. The smell of pipe smoke and Chanel and all-spice and English lavender and the gray of tweed and the salt-and-pepper and the gabardine skirts and coats in pastel shades. People passed and repassed and stopped before crossing. All his fellows.

From his stand he could see the raised finger from the blue sleeve and it went up and down in deliberate rhythm. He saw the jaunty derby leaning over, the sign swinging now, a plaything of the breeze, dismay on swarthinness. No words came to him; the loose lips did not move, the chin was not working. It

looked like the end of the drama and so he turned to walk towards the lions.

On the Forty-second Street side of the large edifice, the steps to the entrance were busy up and down and he took his time in climbing them, saving what vigor he had. No cause to hurry now, he knew, no reason to move fast, no need for speed.

At the top of the first flight of steps he stopped and put out his foot to look at his shoes and found that the laces were loose and one completely untied. He wondered how that came about. Now, with congress gaiters there were no laces to come untied.

He went down to the shoes in a slight bend that gave a dirk of pain and made him quickly straighten up. His side was acting up. He bent once more, this time slowly and easily, on guard for the slightest sign of stiffness and pain. He tied each shoelace slowly, deliberately, his fingers more clumsy than he had ever noticed before. His whole body felt as though it had been melted and poured into his clothes. The back of his undershirt adhered to his skin.

Now he could stand fully erect and move up the remaining flight to the dark door and push it open. He had to dodge the young men with uncombed hair and short coats and armsful of books. He looked at their young, eager faces, their careless appearance. Someone was at his side, the corner of his eye told him by the blackness. The voice came forth controlled, demanding. "Brother, I'd like a word with you."

He turned his head and directly beheld the man, tall and devoid of the hanging placard. He didn't say a word to answer him.

"I know you'll give it to me."

The tall man was sure of himself, although subdued in tone. His sign was now rolled up and he held it in his long hairy hand, its shape now different but its inherent force still a sort of weapon.

The small man looked away from the furled thing, unpleasant symbol, and from the tall blackness, and he stared across the busy thoroughfare to the far sidewalk, where the sun fondled the gay shapes and the virile forms, escorting them along the bright pathway where they moved with easy cadence and care-free step.

He could see the displays in the windows of the mammoth stores that lined the street, the busy rialto, and the suits and shirts and hats and dresses and shoes placed in the exact position to catch the shopper's eye. He let his eyes close a little and found the yellows and reds and blues and the stripes and the whiteness took on rococo shapes and lines. The whole panorama was a medley of forms, a wild array of color and dark stabs.

He looked back again to the ground at his feet, at the uncleaned steps and the dizzy pattern from the stamped-on cigarettes and paper and tinfoil and the tiny pools of spittle.

Without saying a word, the small man led the way to the low stone bench that was on the right as one entered the building. Down here, a flight below the busy entrance

they would be out of the library traffic. The smell of the black earth came up and over to them, damp and pungent and redolent of leaves long dead and their wetness. Here the morning sun only could touch the ground, but its fugitive glance never had a chance to sweeten the soil.

Boxwood slowly put forth its shy greenness. It could never hope to match the eagerness of the trees and bushes and the blossomy things that thrived in the brightness of the famous avenue. The air was damp and quiet, and the presence of the two in black gave a grimness to the setting.

Their silence was a plodding thing, full of the heaviness of mystery and ignorance. In another middle time and another middle age two similar figures in brown or white or black gowns might have met on stone bench before a temple dedicated to similar pursuits, but they would have a common ground for understanding and discussion. The small man found himself brought up short.

"Why'd you do it?"

He felt the prick in his cuticle, but he kept his eyes averted so that he would not see the face of the tall man, preferring to watch the life in the sun across the chasm, desiring to join the march of shapely limbs and well-shod men, never tiring of looking at the swirling coats and dresses, the speeding business, the walking city. He gave no thought to answering the question. It could answer itself.

"You played a trick on a colleague." He resented the authoritarian tone, pontifical even in its

rich quality; he would not answer. He could not get his mind to work and form words. Effrontery iced his mental faculties, the tall man's effrontery.

"We're in the same business and should be one." The small man wasn't certain what was meant by the word *business*. The same business? He hoped not, he could see the connotations of the word, the sordidness of extracting money from people under some sort of compulsion. He could hear rattling of coins and the counting of change. Allied words marched through his mind, words that spoke of the street and the plaza and the great spectaculum, the gate, and the take, and the cut, and the slice. He could put this tall man on the right track.

But what would emerge? An inane discussion on religion? Talk of making a livelihood? He could see the men at the newsstand crying their newspapers, and the speedy trucks rolling along that carried the heavy bundles to throw them out at corners. Li'l Abner and Dick Tracy and Baseball Sports in *The Daily Record*.

He could counter with "Are we?" Or putting the counter-attack another way, "What makes you so sure?" And about being one, he thought that business wasn't the best integrator; neither is roguery, though both are said to make people thick. But he could only think, he couldn't talk.

"Don't you ever talk, friend?"

He looked at the mouth from where the words came, the wide mouth, handsome and cruel and forceful. The mouth of a showman.

He looked away from the dark window of the soul.

"You gave that cop wrong impressions."

The collar of the small man moved up his neck to grab the short hairs and pull at them and make him twitch his neck. An annoying itch. His collar was getting small and his neck too tight. He opened his mouth again, and again words refused to issue. He was a veritable mute. Suppose he might never speak again!

"Before I go to get some lunch, I'd like to tell you something," the tall man said with a show of displeasure and contempt; "you ought to know yourself like I do." He waved the folded sign reprovingly at the small man. "That's why I carry this sign, because I know myself; not one of you could do it."

The small man brought his right hand up slowly and put it to his forehead; and the big blackness got up hurriedly. He spoke as he rose. "No, you don't."

Again the small man was fascinated by the long flow of the coat and the tall man's quick reflexes. He knew how to make his dramatic movements count. He looked down at the small man, who still sat on the white bench. "Friend, I have to eat and it's going to be a problem today, unless like a colleague you'll help me out. Not much money."

He stood in front of the small man swaying with an easy rhythm, keeping slow time by having the furled sign go back and forth on the swivel of his hand, a metronome in largo time.

"Brother, can you spare something,

something that will show your appreciation of our meeting today?"

The small man looked at his face. It was in repose and could have been the visage of a Park Avenue clergyman at the bedside of a dying patron.

The small man's eyes were quizzical, unbelieving. He looked into the tall man's eyes, but the man never flinched. "I've fifteen cents. What could you get for that?" he said.

He stopped moving the sign and held it in his left hand like a drum major holds his baton when he's not swinging it.

The small man felt in the inside pocket of his inner coat, still watching the shoes of the tall man. He took out a large, tooled-leather dark brown wallet and fingered a bill. The tall man's eyes went large at the sight of the expensive wallet and larger still at the bill. The tall man looked earnestly towards the wallet, and at the small man, and at the people coming up and down. He put out his hand before the dollar was free of the leather wallet.

He took hold of the bill without saying a word and moved to descend the steps, with more hurry than seemed necessary. Maybe he was hungrier than he pretended. It was after lunch time.

When he reached the sidewalk, he unfurled his sign and hung it again in its familiar place. From his pocket he brought out a tiny notebook and took it in his right hand. He held his notebook high. The small man stood to watch him, to hear him again.

"Folks," the tall man cried out in his loud voice, "did you read your

Bible today? Even the clergy should read their Bible every day."

When he said "clergy," he turned with his sign so that he could look up to where the small man was standing.

Neither man made any sign that they saw each other. As the tall man walked towards Sixth Avenue, the man at the bench kept his attention on him until he could no longer see him. Then he walked slowly up the remaining steps to the library entrance. Before touching the door to go in, he stopped.

His needs were physical needs, but not food. He let his feet turn, and walked down. He couldn't spend any time in the library this afternoon, nor did he wish to take a walk in the street, or in the park, or along the river.

Some inner voice told him that he would never feel invigorated until he reached his own apartment, and could take off his black clothes, and stepped under the shower. That might help him, would be a sign that the world he knew and lived in was still carrying on.

To Death

(A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning)

By Brother Adelbert

There lie the smoking fields, the gaunt woods, charred
And choked with demolition where the hand
Of Fire stripped from them every sheathing band
Of glory, leaving skeletons with sard
Smoke rising from stalk brash and seared shard.
And then He said to me: At your command
Shall these stalks live, O son of man, and stand
Forth clothed with leaves and fruit for your regard?
Only the Vine remains, with long root deep
Sunk in an ocean of ash; but the fruit of the Vine,
Touched, tingles the brain like a knife on the teeth;
Yet the pity of Fire is in this, to make me keep
Five wits at arm's length while I drink the wine
Lethal to Death, for whom I wove this wreath.

The Theater in Philadelphia

Is There a Doctor in the House?

By Dan Rodden

THE PLAYWRIGHT had long been considered the primary artist of the theater; this notion has apparently been supplanted. The play-doctor is now your man. Or rather the play-specialist; certainly the playwright is still a doctor, as in the sense of constant revision he always has been, but he is a general practitioner. In emergencies—and in an age where plays cost a minimum of forty thousand dollars to produce, every snuffle is an emergency—he calls in the specialist. Or if he does not see the need, and prefers to depend upon his own back-country skills to see the patient through out-of-town ailments to the crisis of a Broadway opening, members of the immediate family—the producer and possibly the important backers—are apt to go over his head and call in specialized assistance.

The idea is not really new. In years past, such a specialist as Dr. George S. Kaufman was frequently consulted in doubtful cases; his reputation was such that the G.P. was inclined to welcome his professional assistance. Drs. Lindsay and Crouse once ministered to a play diseased, called *Bodies in the Cellar*; it recovered and lived a full span as *Arsenic and Old Lace*. (Dr. Kesselring, the G.P. on that case, retired for a number of years thereafter; he had diagnosed his patient as melodramatic, whereas specialists Lindsay and Crouse had more correctly seen symptoms of comedy, and had so treated. Kesselring achieved a certain reputation, however, which persisted until he was so unwise as to enter into general practice again last season with *Four Times Twelve Is 48*, whereupon his license was revoked.) Earliest of all still practicing, Dr. George Abbott is a specialist noted for dramatic recoveries. There have been others.

But this is the Age of Specialization, and the past few seasons have seen a logical idea carried to illogical lengths. Which has been well demonstrated by the current try-out season in Philadelphia, especially by its first play.

BACK IN THE MID-THIRTIES, a relative halcyon period when we knew the empty feeling at the pit of our stomach was only hunger, a limber, bird-headed man and a sprightly, red-headed girl danced their way into the heart of America as had no such pair since Vernon Castle crashed his plane, and Irene married a McLaughlin and took up anti-vivisectionism. Not to make a rebus of it, the two in question were Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers.

Early in September, Miss Rogers returned to the stage for the first time in twenty-one years, or since she sang "Embraceable You" in *Girl Crazy*. Her vehicle, to pervert meanings, was Louis Verneuil's *Love and*

Let Love, and opened the new season at the Forrest Theater. The opening was eagerly awaited. M. Verneuil had had considerable luck the season before with *Affairs of State*, and those who assumed it was nothing more than a personal triumph for Miss Celeste Holm were confounded by its continued success after she relinquished her role to Miss June Havoc, who is no place like Holm. The combination of circumstances seemed to augur well for a good night of comedy, and the advance sale bespoke confidence in this prediction. It was the chagrin of the opening night audience to discover that both their past pets had let them down badly. Verneuil had created, or more likely dusted off, an obvious and humorless piece, and Miss Rogers, though heaven knows no jury would ever convict her, was playing quite as obviously and humorlessly.

I have a great deal of admiration for the charms of Mr. Alfred Lunt, and his phonetic acrobatics have always seemed to me quite effective and amusing. But this sort of play (I refer here to the suave, unfunny comedy of the sexes: cf. anything recent by Noel Coward excepting possibly *Blithe Spirit*) always seems to tempt the leading male actors into a vocal impersonation of Mr. Lunt, and Miss Rogers' associates, the Messrs. Paul McGrath and Tom Helmore, were not proof against this temptation. In view of the lines they were called upon to speak, you couldn't blame either of them for deciding to waive a legitimate characterization in favor of the Lunt technique. But I did feel it was going a little too far when Miss Rogers impersonated him, too.

The Philadelphia reviewers were kindly disposed towards the venture, hence avoided discussion of the play and Miss Rogers' performance, rather concentrating upon how handsomely her dress designer had turned her out. However, this did not quite satisfy the producers, perhaps influenced to doubt by the fact that large audiences, trapped into this prior commitment, were not amused. General practitioner Verneuil, professing not to be disturbed about the condition, issued an encouraging bulletin and several Gallic shrugs, and took off for Florida, thus displaying an attitude which, whether we continue the medical analogy or revert to theater practice, was rather unprofessional. And left the immediate family group to frantic thumbing of *What To Do Till the Doctor Comes*.

Fortunately, or so it may have seemed at the time, help was at hand; the American Medical Association was having its annual convention at Atlantic City, and it was but an hour's fast drive to the bedside. Recognizable in the second-night crowd by their lapel insignia, a caduceus flanked by the masques of comedy and tragedy, the play-physicians were most notably represented by Drs. John van Druten and Abe Burrows. That Dr. van Druten is the eminent heart specialist, ex-Harley Street, whereas Dr. Burrows is the famed Brooklyn belly man, would seem clear indication that the patient was unable to say where it hurt. The two learned gentlemen made a cursory investigation, shook their heads gravely,

and fled the case, suggesting only that the New England climate might help, but holding out no hopes for an eventual cure.

Daunted, which is the infrequently-used opposite of nothing daunted, the producers arranged for a postponement of the New York crisis, and a short sojourn in Boston. During the initial period in the Athens of the West when no specialist would take the case, the patient tried home remedies: it was reported in *Variety*, a medical journal, that Miss Rogers and her cohorts were making up their own lines onstage, as a *commedia* gesture in the direction of doing *something*. This theatrical equivalent of Hadacol proving ineffective, the producers were finally able to prevail upon Dr. Sally Benson, noted specialist in the diseases of adolescence, to take over. Despite re-staging assistance from Dr. Bretaine Windust, the two weeks in Boston seem to have had little result; when the patient reached Manhattan, the Philadelphia prognosis was justified.

PAINT YOUR WAGON. *A Musical Play by Frederick Loewe and Alan Jay Lerner, at the Shubert Theater.*

The first musical this fall, *Paint Your Wagon*, held promise because it was the collaborative effort of the team which had provided the felicitous *Brigadoon*. In this instance, Loewe has given us music of some character, but Lerner's book—which, as a guess, has been cut from a hundred pages to something like forty—is sentimental, poorly motivated, and simple-minded. (Simple-mindedness is not necessarily a vice in a musical play; here it is, because the trappings are epic.) The performers are mostly up to the demands of the script but—unless you are a James Barton man, which I am not—they never rise above it. One of the songs, "I Dream of Elisa," has a chance to become what is known as a standard, unless it is defeated by Lerner's obvious and saccharine final rime. Incidentally, the entire company was thrown into an absolute panic opening night by the presence in the audience of the aforementioned Dr. Burrows; it turned out he was there purely in a lay capacity, but it was several days before order was restored. Again, comforting Philadelphia reviews failed to reassure the producers, and again they scheduled further out-of-town treatment in Boston. (A buxom lady was heard to say, in the Shubert lobby after the show, "I liked it *much* better than *Oklahoma!*" I think, and I hope, that she is the same lady whom I overheard make the same remark last Spring, about *Flahooley*.)

FAITHFULLY YOURS. *A Comedy by L. Bush-Fekete and Mary Helen Fay, based on a play by Jean Bernard Luc, at the Forrest Theater.*

A tiresome and trivial item about a wife who attends a performance of Eliot's *Cocktail Party* and thereupon suspects her husband of psychosis because he is too faithful, this is a play where the initial premise is so ridiculously unacceptable that you resent it every time you laugh thereafter. Such a motivation might possibly tee-off a domestic-type radio half-hour, or a fairly amusing eight-minute revue skit, but here attenuation

proves disastrous. No doctoring was even attempted, the producer apparently being aware that he had caught something like the common cold, which would last about two weeks whether or not treated. Again, as with *Love and Let Love*, you had to restrain your impulse to burst into the theater manager's office and declaim, loudly, "This is the Forrest's prime evil!"

THE NUMBER. A Play by Arthur Carter, at the Walnut Street Theater.

This melodrama was well-received by the Philadelphia critics, who pronounced it well-made, and praised the playing. What doctoring was necessary was accomplished by its director, George Abbott, M.D., who removed an appendix (the leading lady!) and ventured other mild therapy. I didn't get to see it. For some unfair reason, I don't think it will run very long.

TOP BANANA. A Musical Comedy by Hy Craft and Johnny Mercer, at the Shubert Theater.

I have been laughing at this material ever since I can remember, and I certainly don't intend to stop now. *Top Banana* has a poor score and an unreasonable plot, which turns out not to matter in the least. What does matter is that Phil Silvers gives one of the best-sustained comic performances of recent memory and that the play incorporates every successfully rowdy bit of low comedy business since the first Aristophanic prat-fall. The only doctors in sight were the Messrs. Kronkhite and Quackenbush, who slapped the patient in the puss with a custard pie and beat about his head with an inflated bladder, whereupon the three went skipping merrily off to New York. I have no respect for this play whatsoever, and I certainly wish I had money in it.

BAREFOOT IN ATHENS. A Play by Maxwell Anderson, at the Locust Street Theater.

But for the resourceful and accomplished performance of Barry Jones as Socrates, Maxwell Anderson's most recent testimonial to democracy would be a piece uncomfortably mixed in tone. As it is, Mr. Jones makes the play succeed as comedy; it fails as the drama of ideas Anderson says he intended it to be. The comedy points are made because Jones is just the Socrates our meagre acquaintance imagines: constantly questioning, ever-seeking, humorous when serious and serious when humorous. The ideas fail because Anderson again belabors an already-convinced audience with the already accepted symbol, Democracy. Shaw's ideas, or Ibsen's, have controversial spark enough to lend an extra-theatrical excitement; Anderson's are platitudes. (That is, they are unless you remember Act II, Scene 1 of *Joan of Lorraine*, where he unwisely conceptualized and defined his notion of democracy, and disqualified himself as a thinker.) Obviously, no play-doctor would be called up by Anderson; his plays die, when they die, unattended and in the odor of sanctity.

